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C.I.A. SAYS ISRAEL HAS 10-20 A-BOMBS

Briefing for Aircraft Group
Also Reports Soviet Space
Effort 'in a Shambles'

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 15—

The Central Intelligence Agency estimates that Israel has 10 to 20 nuclear weapons "available for use," according to an agency official quoted today by a science journalist.

The estimate goes well beyond previous American judgments of Israel's nuclear strength, both in quantity and state of readiness.

The disclosure of the C.I.A. briefing in today's issue of The Washington Post was made by Arthur Kranish, editor of Science Trends, a weekly Washington newsletter. He said he had been among 150 Washington members of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics invited to the agency last Thursday.

The invitation said: "The C.I.A. will provide an unclassified briefing to A.A.I.A. members on C.I.A. intelligence functions in support of United States policy for a peaceful world." It said there would be refreshments, a buffet, a briefing and a question-and-answer session.

The journalist said that after a five-minute briefing by senior

C.I.A. officials the session was opened to questions from the audience—most, he said, being representatives of foreign and domestic aircraft manufacturers.

Secret Data on Soviet

One of the questions dealt with Israel's nuclear capability, Mr. Kranish said, and the responding official gave "a one-sentence answer."

Other responses reported by Mr. Kranish made these points: that the Soviet space program was "in a shambles" and probably incapable of handling a manned lunar landing, that Soviet science lagged in applying advanced technology such as in construction of dust-free rooms for electronic assembly, that three large Soviet rocket boosters, twice the size of American Saturn V rockets, had exploded and that the Soviet reconnaissance satellite program trailed several years behind the American program.

These estimates had been given circulation by C.I.A. officials through briefing for newsmen during the last year.

On Israel's nuclear weapon program, The Boston Globe reported last July that American Government analysts believe that Israel has made more than 10 nuclear weapons but indicated this was based on circumstantial evidence—the development of a missile delivery system and the output of Israel's nuclear reactors.

Two weeks ago a Government official told The New York Times he "believed" Israel had manufactured 12 to 15 nuclear weapons, but he emphasized that this estimate was based on empiric evidence.

Confirmation Was Refused

A request by The Times at the C.I.A. for confirmation of the estimate was rejected on the ground that Israel's nuclear capability was too sensitive to discuss.

Last Thursday, before going to the C.I.A. briefing, Mr. Kranish called the Washington Post and offered to write an article on any news that might be forthcoming.

He said he told officials before and after the briefing that he intended to write an article about it and "met no objections." Agency officials said today vigorous objections had been made to Mr. Kranish.

In response to the Kranish article, George Bush, the newly installed director of the C.I.A., issued a statement in which he assumed "full responsibility" for the disclosure of secret information at the briefing.

Mr. Bush also stated:

"There was a clear understanding beforehand that the discussions were private and not for publication or further dissemination."

He added that he was "determined it will not happen again and will issue new guidelines with respect to what may be discussed at such meetings in the future."

Briefings for Citizens

Asked to explain the origin of such meetings, Angus Thuermer, the agency's chief spokesman, said the C.I.A. had made a practice of providing background briefings for select groups of public citizens, with emphasis on business executives, for the last eight years. The aeronautics group briefing was arranged by a member who had attended a previous briefing for alumni of the Harvard Business School two months ago.